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Poetry, Prophecy and History: Divine Speech in Psalms 81 and 95

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1. Cultic Prophecy in Scholarship

Even though there were some early discussions in scholarship, the debate about cultic prophecy picked up pace only with scholars Sigmund Mowinckel and Hermann Gunkel. While Mowinckel in the 1923 third volume of his *Psalmenstudien* put forward the idea that prophets played a significant role in the Ancient Israel cult and that their original oracles were preserved in some of the psalms,¹ Hermann Gunkel (and his student Joachim Begrich respectively) took the opposite stand. In their 1933 introduction into the psalms, they explained the prophetic poems (§9 “Das Prophetische in den Psalmen”) by an imitation of prophetic form and content, questioning the actual performance of a prophetic word in the cult.² Since then, no consensus has been reached on the relationship between prophecy and psalmody. While Mowinckel’s cultic model has been taken up by a number

¹ Mowinckel, Sigmund. *Psalmenstudien: III. Kultprophetie und prophetische Psalmen* (Skifter utgit av Videnskapsselskapets i Kristiania I: Hist.-Filos; Klasse. Oslo: Dybwad, 1922), esp. 1–29; [see also the contribution by Lester Grabbe in this volume \(needs cross-referencing\)](#).

² Gunkel, Hermann/Begrich, Joachim, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (HAT II; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1933), 329–381.

of scholars,³ Gunkel's idea of imitation finds reception especially in studies focusing on the function of divine speech in the psalms.⁴

This paper is only a small contribution to this question, focusing on divine speech in the two festal psalms 81 and 95. The two psalms do not only feature divine speech and are deemed to be prime examples of cultic prophecy,⁵ but this feature is combined with an

³ See p.e. Jörg Jeremias, *Kultprophetie und Gerichtsverkündigung in der späten Königszeit Israels* (WMANT 35; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1970); James G. Harris III, "Prophetic Oracles in the Psalter." (PhD Diss, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1970); Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979); Klaus Koenen, *Gottesworte in den Psalmen: Eine formgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (BThS 30; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1996), and more recently, John W. Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy in the Psalms* (BZAW 352; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005).

⁴ See the studies by William H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalmody and Prophecy* (JSOTS 27; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984); Raymond J. Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms: The Prophetic Liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem* (JSOTS 118; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); Hermann Spieckermann, "Rede Gottes und Wort Gottes: Die Entdeckung der Antwort Gottes im Gebet," in Hermann Spieckermann (ed.), *Lebenskunst und Gotteslob in Israel: Anregungen aus Psalter und Weisheit für die Theologie* (FAT 91; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014 [1994 revised]), 217–231; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, "Psalm 95: Gattungsgeschichtliche, kompositionskritische und bibeltheologische Anfragen," in K. Seybold/E. Zenger (ed.), *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung*. FS W. Beyerlin (HBS 1. Freiburg: Herder, 1998), 29–44; and Andrea Doeker, *Die Funktion der Gottesrede in den Psalmen: Eine poetologische Untersuchung* (BBB 135; Berlin/Wien: Philo, 2002).

⁵ See Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung*, 329 (classifying both Ps 81:6c–11 and 95:7d–11 as examples of "prophetic sections of mixed liturgies" ["prophetische(n) Stücke(n) aus

interest into biblical history, which makes the pair an ideal object of study. In the following, I want to investigate first how the interaction between poetry, prophecy, and history can be described, before I will ask which model can best account for the literary evidence in these two psalms.

2. Analysis of Content and Function

2.1. Psalm 81

In the case of Ps 81, there is wide agreement that the psalm exhibits a two-fold structure, with a festal summons in the first part (81:2–5[6b]) and a divine speech in the second part (81:6[6c]–17).⁶ First, let us have a short look how the text functions in its present form. The psalm starts with a hymnic summons to praise the God of Jacob on the occasion of a specific feast day in 81:2–4 (81:4: “the day of our festival” ליום חגנו). This day is deemed

‘gemischten Liturgien’”]); Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 150–159, 179–185; and idem, “Cultic Prophecy in Assyria and in the Psalms,” *JAOS* 127 (2007): 29–40 (33–34).

⁶ While mainly older studies assume a caesura in the middle of verse 81:6 (see Charles A. Briggs and Emilie G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* [London: T&T Clark, 1907], 209–210; Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 356; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen: 2. Teilband: Psalmen 60–150* [BK XV/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003, 727–728; Michael L. Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100* [AncB 17; Garden City, NJ / New York, NY: Doubleday, 1968], 263; Thijs Booij, “The Background of the Oracle in Psalm 81,” *Bib* 65 (1984): 465–475 [465]; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* [WBC 20; Dallas: Word Books, 1990], 321–323; Tournay, *Seeing*, 173–175), more recent studies suggest a break between 81:5 and 81:6, mostly combined with a redaction historical model (see Norbert Lohfink, “Noch einmal *ḥōq ūmišpāt* [zu Ps 81.5f],” *Bib* 73 [1992]: 253–254; Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* [HAT I/15; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996], 322; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100* [HThK.AT. Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2000], 470–471; and Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 208–211).

to be a divine mandate for Jacob in 81:5 (כי חק לישראל הוא משפט לאלהי יעקב). The following verse 6 has been described as a transitional verse,⁷ changing both in metrum and topic. By featuring a tricolon, the first two stanzas 81:6a–b relate the feast to the time when YHWH ventured out against Egypt (בצאתו על-ארץ מצרים).⁸

The third colon 81:6c, however, marks the beginning of a new part by introducing the voice of a first person, who in present tense reports an audition through a voice that he/she does not recognise (שפת לא-ידעתי אשמע). What the speaker hears is a four-part divine oracle in 81:7–17, which is characterized by a change of addressees throughout.⁹ At first, in 81:7–8, God recalls his saving actions for his people in the past. Highlighted is the episode at the waters in Meribah, which is, however, not presented as an example of the people's misconduct, but referred to as an episode, where Yhwh “tested” them (81:8: אבחנך על-מי מריבה). The Hebrew verb used to describe the testing, בִּחַן, does not occur in

⁷ See Lohfink, “Noch einmal,” 254 (“eine Gelenkstelle der Gedankenführung”).

⁸ The variants that testify to a reading מֵן instead of עַל (LXX, Vulgate to Jerome, and Peshitta) represent a harmonisation with the more common motif “to go out from Egypt”; thus the MT reading should be retained as *lectio difficilior* (see Lohfink, “Noch einmal,” 245; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 474; Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 319; and Anja Klein, *Geschichte und Gebet: Die Rezeption der biblischen Geschichte in den Psalmen des Alten Testaments* [FAT 94; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014], 162–163).

⁹ In a previous publication, I offered a literary critical analysis of Ps 81 on the basis of the change of addresses, arriving at a three-stage redaction of an original law *paraenesis* in 81:1–6b, 9–11, 14, 17a (see Klein, *Geschichte*, 161–166). At present, however, I am less convinced that this model can account adequately for the literary problems, and will thus focus on the function of the psalm rather than its development.

the Exodus narratives, but it can be found also in Ps 95:9, which suggests that the interpretation of the narrative episode in these two psalms is related.¹⁰

With the exception of the reference to Meribah, the terminology in Ps 81 is rather general, which makes it difficult to relate the narrative action to specific events in biblical history. For example, the removal of the load in 81:7 (הסירותי מסבל שכמו) has been described as “Exodus terminology” by some scholars,¹¹ yet the psalm uses the noun סָבַל, whereas the Exodus narrative features the noun סָבָלוֹת throughout (Exod 1:11; 2:11; 5:4, 5; 6:6, 7). Furthermore, the specific notion that YHWH will free the shoulder from the burden (81:7: שָׁכַם), refers to prophetic literature (Isa 9:3; 10:27; 14:25, see Gen 49:15). In a similar way, the verse Ps 81:8 brings in theophany imagery, which recalls the events at Sinai, but the language does not allow for clear identification of a specific narrative *Vorlage*.

In the second part of the speech 81:9–11, God directly addresses his people. Starting from a rather wooing summons to listen (81:9: שמע עמי) that recalls clearly the introduction of the *Schēma Israel* (Deut 6:4: שמע ישראל) as well as prophetic summons,¹² Yhwh starts to admonish his people by calling to mind the deuteronomistic central law: “There

¹⁰ However, Ps 95:9 assumes the reverse test set-up with the biblical fathers “testing” YHWH in Massah and Meribah, whereby the main verb is נסה (אשר נסוני אבותיכם בחנוני), see in the following; one might consider, if בחנוני in 95:9 represents a later addition that assimilates Ps 95 with Ps 81.

¹¹ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 475. For an Exodus reference, note also Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen: Übersetzt und erklärt* (previously HK II/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, ⁶1986 [1926]), 358; Dahood, *Psalms II*, 265; Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 323; and Seybold, *Psalmen*, 323.

¹² See in the prophetic books Isa 39:5; 44:1; 48:2; Jer 22:2; 28:7, 15; 34:4; 38:20; Ezek 2:8; 3:10; 21:3; 40:4; 44:5; Amos 7:16; Zech 3:8. The closeness to Deut 6:4 and the deuteronomistic tradition in general is also commented on by Kraus, *Psalmen*, 2, 731; Tournay, *Seeing*, 174; and Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 217.

shall be no strange god among you; you shall not bow down to a foreign god” (81:10: אל נִכְר (‘‘foreign god’’), the formulation combines the versions in Deut 32:12 and Ps 44:21, rather than drawing on Decalogue terminology.¹³ The divine admonition continues with a self-introduction in 81:11, where YHWH uses the Exodus credo to remind Israel that he had led them out of Egypt (אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַמֵּעֵלְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם), followed by a command to open their mouth so that he can fill them (הִרְחַבְפִּיךָ וְאִמְלֵאֲהוּ). This formulation has a polyvalent background in alluding both to the food miracles of the desert narratives and the spiritual nourishment with the (divine) word.¹⁴

The third oracle part in 81:12–13 is again formulated as a speech about the people that similar to the previous section starts from a statement about their willingness to listen. This time, however, it concerns their disobedience in the past, when according to 81:12 ‘‘they did not hear’’ (וְלֹא־שָׁמְעוּ) and refused obedience to YHWH (לֹא־אָבָה לִי). In consequence, God consigns the people to their stubborn hearts, thus to walk in their own counsels (81:13: וְאִשְׁלַחְהוּ בְּשִׁרְיֹת לִבָּם יֵלְכוּ בְּמוֹעֲצוֹתֵיהֶם). The terminology of these two verses is highly reminiscent of prophetic literature: Firstly, the verb אָבָה is in the Hebrew Bible nearly consistently negated, and in combination with the verb שָׁמַע it expresses the

¹³ Deut 32:12: ‘‘YHWH alone guided him, no foreign God (אֵל נִכְר) guided him’’; Ps 44:21: ‘‘If we had forgotten our God’s name and spread our hands in prayer to a strange God (לֹאֵל זָר).’’ On this literary background, see Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 575, and following Klein, *Geschichte*, 164.

¹⁴ Similarly Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 476. Dahood, *Psalms 51–100*, 266, focuses on ‘‘the feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness,’’ while Tate, *Psalms, 51–100*, sees the meaning tilting to the idea of ‘‘filling the mouth and opening the mouth to receive and express speech.’’

enhanced disobedience of the people, especially in Isaiah and Ezekiel.¹⁵ Secondly, the idea of the stubborn heart (בשרירות לבם) is a *leitmotif* especially in the book of Jeremiah, where in most cases the judgement on Israel and the people is explained with reference to the people's obstinacy.¹⁶ The expression describes the "evil disposition of Israel/Judah, which manifests itself in constant apostasy from YHWH and thus stands in the way of the optimum goal of divine history."¹⁷

With the final part of the psalm in 81:14–17, the focus is now on the present, when YHWH voices the desire that his people would listen to him. The optative aspect is expressed with a participle together with the conditional particle לו: "Oh that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways" (81:14: לו עמי שמע לי ישראל בדרכי יהלכו).¹⁸ For this case, in the following two verses 81:15–16, YHWH outlines his action in return that comprises subduing their enemies (81:15–16), and providing provisions for his people (81:17). This promise of provisions, however, presents some exegetical challenges. While the first half of the verse 81:17 contains a statement about the people with a

¹⁵ See Isa 1:19; 28:12; 30:9, 15; Ezek 3:7; 20:8; see also Bo Johnson, "אבה," *TDOT* I (1974): 24–26 (26), who argues that לא אבה is a technical term for the hardness of heart.

¹⁶ See Jer 3:17; 7:24; 9:13; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17, further Deut 29:18. On the literary differentiation of the occurrences, see Fabry and van Meeteren, "שררות," *TDOT* XV (2006): 482–488 (485–487).

¹⁷ Fabry and van Meeteren, "שררות," 487. They further note for Ps 81:13(12): "But Israel's stubbornness is so overwhelming that God consigns Israel to its stubbornness – with the reservation that repentance is still possible – and thus turns Israel's sin into its punishment" (Fabry and van Meeteren, "שררות," 487).

¹⁸ Literally, see Friedrich Baethgen, *Die Psalmen: Übersetzt und erklärt* (HAT II; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, ³1904), 256: "Wenn doch mein Volk ein auf mich hörendes wäre."

subject third person (מחלב חטה¹⁹ ויאכילהו: “He would feed him from the best of the wheat”), the people are addressed directly in the second half, changing to a speech of a first person singular: “I would satisfy you with honey from the rock” (ומצור דבש אשביעד). Most exegetes suggest a conjecture of the initial verb ויאכילהו to make this part of the divine speech (“I would”),²⁰ while the incongruence of the suffixes is then explained with the overall style of the psalm.²¹ It is certainly possible that the first half of 81:17 has been influenced by the preceding verse 81:16, but there is no manuscript evidence for the conjectural reading. With regard to content, the promises in 81:17 draw on the imagery in

¹⁹ The initial verb in 81:17 is an imperfect consecutivum (ויאכילהו), which sits oddly in the sequence of imperfect forms following on the optative in 81:14. However, only Seyboldt, *Psalmen*, 321, seems to take this into account (“Und er speiste es von Fett [und] Korn”), while most scholars refrain from comment and continue the conditional sequence in 81:14ff. (see, however, Baethgen, *Psalmen*, 256, who decides to read a simple *waw* instead of the imperfect consecutivum, arguing: “Man erwartet aber eine Fortsetzung der Verheissung”). Following GesK §111x, it could be assumed that the imperfect consecutivum in 81:17 is dependent on the previous sequence of imperfect forms, “which represents an action occurring only conditionally” and the imperfect consecutivum is thus “likewise used only in a hypotheticalal sense.”

²⁰ Thus Baethgen, *Psalmen*, 256; Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 360; Kraus, *Psalmen* 2, 726; Seyboldt, *Psalmen*, 321; Hosfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 469; differently Dahood, *Psalms II*, 263 (“He would feed him”), and Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 318 (“Also, he would feed him”).

²¹ Dahood, *Psalms II*, 267 (“The shift from the third person subject and object in the first colon to the first person verb and second person object in the final colon may be explained as court style”); similarly Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 219 (“Der unterschiedliche Numerus der Suffixe greift das Changieren des Psalms in der Bezeichnung des Volkes auf.”).

Deut 32:13–14 and thus refer to the life in the Promised Land.²² However, the idea that the people are sustained from the rock (Ps 51:17: *וּמִצּוֹר דָּבַשׁ אֲשֶׁבִיעֶךָ*, see Deut 32:13) does not only recall the miracles of the desert wanderings, where YHWH provided sustenance from the rock (see Exod 17:6; Ps 78:15, 20; 105:41), but the association of *צוֹר* as divine title (see Deut 32:4, 18, 30, 31, 37; Ps 73:26; 78:35) also suggest a spiritual understanding.²³

To sum up, the festal psalm 81 is characterized clearly by a mixture of psalmody and prophecy. Further to the distinctive divine speech, it is mainly the paraenetic content and the links with prophetic literary traditions that demonstrate why the psalm has been classified as “cultic prophecy” in the past. There are some more distinctive prophetic features, most remarkably the use of hearing as a *leitmotif* (81:6, 9, 12, 14)²⁴ that structures the second part of the psalm and interweaves the present of the audience with the past of biblical history. It starts with the audience participating in the speaker’s audition (81:6), while the divine speech summons the people to listen (81:9), recalling the father’s failure to do so in the past; the oracle finally leads into the wish that the people would listen to their god (81:14). As such, the divine speech in 81:9–17 transcends the psalm’s setting and addresses the present readership, establishing an immediacy between deity and audience.²⁵ In this process of actualization, the lessons from the past are shown to carry

²² See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 476. On the literary background in Deut 32:13–14, see further Baethgen, *Psalmen*, 256; Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 326; and Tournay, *Seeing*, 175.

²³ Thus Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 476–477; and Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 219–220.

²⁴ On the structuring use of the verb *שמע* with regard to Ps 81:9–15, see also Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 219.

²⁵ See Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 220.

weight in the present,²⁶ and it is YHWH's salvation action in biblical history, from which the hope for future obedience of the people is derived: they are given the choice, if they want to continue the willfulness of biblical Israel, or if they want to listen and partake of future salvation.²⁷

2.2. *Psalm 95*

Our second example is Ps 95, a psalm that has frequently been classed with the Asaphite psalms due to form and content, even though it stands outside the collection in Ps 73–83.²⁸ Similar to Ps 81, Ps 95 features a clear two-partite division, starting from a call to

²⁶ Thus Booij, “Background,” 469, labels Ps 81 appropriately as “a theological reflection” using a specific “pattern of remembrances” that Booij identifies in a number of texts; however, he ascribes this specific theological reflection to prophets, which in the case of Ps 81 means a “temple singer” (Booij, “Background,” 468).

²⁷ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 473: “Im Stil einer deuteronomistischen Alternativpredigt werden zwei Möglichkeiten des Verhaltens vor Augen gestellt: auf der einen Seite Undank und Ungehorsam Israels, belegbar aus der Geschichte und in den Konsequenzen bis in die Gegenwart des Sprechers erfahrbar und auf der anderen Seite das gehorsame Hören, das Israel ans Herz gelegt wird, ja, um das mit Versprechungen für die Zukunft geworben wird, die allerdings bestimmte Bedingungen stellen.”

²⁸ See Harry P. Nasuti, *Tradition History and the Psalms of Asaph* (SBL Dissertation Series 88; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 66–67; Hossfeld, “Das Prophetische in den Psalmen—zur Gottesrede der Asafpsalmen im Vergleich mit der des ersten und zweiten Davidpsalters,” in Friedrich Diedrich and Bernd Willmes (eds.), *Ich bewirke das Heil und erschaffe das Unheil (Jes 45,7): Studien zur Botschaft der Propheten*. FS L. Ruppert (fzb 88; Würzburg: Echter, 1998), 223–243 (239–239); and Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 179.

worship in 95:1–7 that is followed by a divine speech in verses 95:8–11, featuring a review of biblical history.²⁹ The initial call in 95:1–7 comprises three summons to praise (95:1, 2, 6), which feature different rationales. The first summons addresses YHWH as “rock of our salvation” (95:1: לְצֹרֵר);³⁰ a divine predication that recalls Ps 81:17, and in the present context is equally ambiguous in anticipating the remembrance of the divine actions in the second part of the psalm. The second call to make a joyful noise (95:2) refers to YHWH’s credentials as king and creator (95:3–4), while the last call to worship employs the image of Yhwh as divine shepherd (95:7a–b), which is a dominating motif in both Psalms and Prophets (see e.g. Ps 23; Jer 23; Ezek 31).³¹

²⁹ On the two-part structure see Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 417; Kraus, *Psalmen*, 2, 828–829; Dahood, *Psalms II*, 353; Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 498. Some exegetes, however, arrive at a three part-structure, including a middle section (6–7a) between the call to worship and the historical review. See Seybold, *Psalmen*, 376–377, and Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 662–664. On the history of research, see in detail Willem S. Prinsloo, “Psalm 95: If Only you Will Listen to His Voice!” in M. Daniel Carroll R., David J.A. Clines, and Philip R. Davies (eds.), *The Bible in Human Society: Essays in Honour of John Rogerson* (JSOTS 200; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1995), 393–410 (393–397). Finally, Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 249, assumes a structure of five strophes, but similarly identifies a divine speech in 95:8–11.

³⁰ On the different associations of this divine title, see Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 662.

³¹ On the image of God as divine shepherd in the Hebrew Bible, see in general Regine Hunziker-Rodewald, *Hirt und Herde: Ein Beitrag zum alttestamentlichen Gottesverständnis* (BWANT 155; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001).

The end of this first part in 95:7c constitutes a break in the flow of the psalm, with what has frequently been described as the onset of a prophetic speech.³² Calling to attention with an emphatic “today,” the speaker expresses his wish that his audience would listen to the divine voice (היום אם־בקלו תשמעו).³³ This distinct reference to the present-day recalls not only Ps 82, but also the exhortations in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 4:40; 5:3; 6:6; 7:11; 9:3; 11:2) that similarly occur in the context of paraenetic addresses. In our psalm, the call in 95:7c is followed by an admonition not to harden their hearts (95:8); a misconduct, for which the events of the desert wandering in Massah and Meribah serve as a paradigm.³⁴ It is the biblical fathers’ willfulness, which is made responsible for them testing YHWH in the wilderness, even though they had been witnesses to his (miracle) work before (95:8: נסוֹנֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם בַּחֲנוּנֵי גַם־רָאוּ פְעָלֵי). This notion is in line with the accounts in the historical psalms, which equally assume that the people “tested” God (נִסָּה, see Ps 78:18, 41, 56; 106:14), while the narrative materials assume the opposite test set-up.³⁵ Here, it is God putting his people to the test (see Exod 16:4; Deut 8:2; 13:4; Judg 2:22; 3:4).

In the last part Ps 95:10–11, perspective changes to a speech about the people, with God reflecting that he had detested this generation for forty years (95:10: אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה אִקוּט בַּדֹּר). His feeling of disgust (קוּט)³⁶ is expressed in the self-quotation that these people have wayward hearts and have not known the divine ways (95:10: עַם תַּעֲיִ לִבָּב הֵם וְהֵם לֹא־יָדְעוּ דַרְכֵי); a terminology that clearly recalls wisdom and prophetic traditions (see Job 12:24; Pro 7:25;

³² See Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 417; Kraus, *Psalmen 2*, 831; and Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 499.

³³ On the optative aspect in Ps 95:7, see Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar*, §163c.

³⁴ See Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 37.

³⁵ On the reception of this narrative tradition in the psalms, see Klein, *Geschichte*, 115, 119, 250.

³⁶ Ps 95:10 is the only instance, where the verb is used with God as subject; the context shows that “in this case *qûṭ* refers less to disgust than to hostile rejection” (Schmoltdt, “קוּט,” *TDOT* XII (2003): 573–575 [574]).

Isa 21:4 53:6; 63:17). The psalm comes to a rather sudden and implacable end with God remembering his punishment that resulted in the vow that the people should be deprived from entering his rest (95:11 *אִם-יִבְאוּ אֶל-מְנוּחָתִי*). This formulation is clearly a cultic interpretation of the ban to enter the Promised Land, which, however, has a double literary background. While the reference to the Meribah-episode in the previous section recalls how Moses and Aaron were prohibited to enter the promised land (cf. Num 20:12; Deut 32:51; Ps 106:32),³⁷ the idea that the people as a whole are banned refers to the divine oath in the scouts' story, when Yhwh vows that the present generation will not enter the land (Num 14:20–23, 28–30).³⁸ Ps 95, however, offers a cultic interpretation of the ban, as the focus is on the banishment from YHWH's resting place (*מְנוּחָה*), which can be understood as cutting the people off from the divine presence in the sanctuary and depriving them from the relationship with their God.³⁹ Thus, it serves as a warning for the present audience, which in Ps 95:1–7 is assembled in God's cultic presence: If they fail to be obedient by hardening their hearts (95:8), they will be deprived of the relationship with their god — just as their historical fathers were.

³⁷ See Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 255.

³⁸ See already Baethgen, *Psalmen*, 295 (“Der Schwur ist der Num 14,28 erzählte.”), further Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 663.

³⁹ In his analysis of the idea of God's rest in Ps 95:11, Georg Braulik, “Gottes Ruhe – das Land oder der Tempel? Zu Psalm 95,11,” in Ernst Haag and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld (eds.), *Freude an der Weisung des Herrn: Beiträge zur Theologie der Psalmen*. FS H. Groß (SBB 13; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, ²1987), 33–44 (41–44), shows that the noun *מְנוּחָה* points to a deuteronomistic understanding, whereby not only the land, but especially the temple (as the place of God's rest) is the goal of the conquest. Therein, the temple is the place where the people have communion with their God “in his rest,” see Braulik, “Gottes Ruhe,” 43; similarly Hossfeld, “Psalm 95,” 38–39; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 663; and Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 255.

There is no identifiable feast in Ps 95, and over the last years, scholarship has moved towards recognizing a general situation of worship rather than a specific festal event.⁴⁰ That fits with the observation that the cultic presence of God is the central motif of the psalm. The first part calls the audience and readership to enjoy his presence, while the references to the past misbehavior of their biblical fathers serves as a cautionary tale to remind them that Yhwh grants his cultic presence only subject to their conduct. Therein, the emphatic call היום (95:7), followed by the admonition to listen and to keep a soft heart, serves to bridge past and present and makes biblical history relevant for the here and now.⁴¹

3. Examples of Cultic Prophecy or Scribal Theology?

The preceding analyses have shown that the element of divine speech plays a significant part in both Ps 81 and 95, which accounts for their frequent classification as examples of cultic prophecy in the past. As this classification relies heavily on a specific socio-cultural model, let us firstly assess the influences of prophetic tradition both from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near Eastern parallels,⁴² before we can review the question, which model can best account for the literary evidence.

⁴⁰ Gwynne H. Davies, "Psalm 95," *ZAW* 85 (1973): 183–195 (187): "On the whole commentators have gradually come to relate the parts of the Psalm more clearly to the scene of worship – the temple, even if there is no agreement concerning the occasion."

⁴¹ Several authors comment on this use of the biblical past in Ps 95 for the purpose of admonishing the present audience. See, e.g., Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 502; Prinsloo, "Psalm 95," 403; and Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 253.

⁴² On the comparison of the Psalms with the Ancient Near Eastern Materials, see John W. Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, and in summary, idem, "Cultic Prophecy in Assyria and in the Psalms," *JAOS* 127 (2007): 29–40.

Obviously, it is first of all the form of a divine oracle in the two psalms that led to the claim of cultic prophecy. Both the divine speeches in Ps 81 and Ps 95 show some peculiarities, though. The divine speech in Ps 81 lacks a proper introduction, but features the rather unique notion of the speaker in 81:6c that he/she does not recognise the speech. As far as I can see, this is without parallel both in the biblical and the Ancient Near Eastern materials,⁴³ and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger point out convincingly that a cult prophet, who is unaccustomed to the audition, does not fit the (cult-prophetic) picture.⁴⁴ Differently, in Ps 95, the oracle is clearly identified as a YHWH-oracle by way of the reference to “his voice” (אִם-בְּקוֹל יְהוָה) in 95:7. Next, both psalms feature the call to listen, which has a literary background in the deuteronomistic exhortation that occurs frequently both in Deuteronomy and the Jeremianic materials. In Ps 95:7, these links are strengthened further by the focus on the present-day impact. However, John Hilber also identifies a parallel in the Assyrian materials, where one oracle contains an address to the congregation, similar to the prophetic summons in Ps 81:9 (SAA 9 3.2 i 27: “[Lis]ten

⁴³ Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 357, relates the introduction in Ps 81:6 in this aspect with 1 Sam 3:7, where, however, at least for the reader the message is clearly characterised as a message from YHWH.

⁴⁴ See Zenger and Hossfeld, *Psalmen 51–100*, 475.

carefully, O Assyrians”).⁴⁵ Finally, the self-introduction formula in Ps 81:11 with reference to the Exodus occurs frequently in the prophetic books, though it is equally at home in the narrative or legislative biblical literature.⁴⁶

As to content, we have identified some motifs in both Ps 81 and 95 with a distinct literary background in the Prophets. These are the idea of YHWH as the divine shepherd, the motif of the people’s wayward hearts, and the divine action of having freed the shoulder from the burden, to name just a few. Yet on the other hand, there stands a good deal of material with a literary background in the narrative and legislative tradition such as the references to Massah and Meribah in the two psalms, the reformulation of the central deuteronomistic law in 81:10–11, or the idea of the forty-year-wanderings in the desert, which is re-interpreted as a time of the people testing their god in (95:10). When it comes to the Ancient Near Eastern materials, the Assyrian oracles contain – to quote Hilber – “nothing comparable to Psalm 81 with regard to rebuke of the people for disobedience,”⁴⁷ but he points to one prophecy, in which the king is admonished for his failure in his cultic

⁴⁵ On the parallel, see Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 159; the translation follows the edition of the oracle in Martti Nissinen (with contributions by C.L. Seow and Robert K. Ritner, edited by Peter Machinist), *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (Writings from the Ancient World 12; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 119; see further Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), 23.

⁴⁶ On the reception of the Exodus in biblical tradition, see Kitchen, “Exodus, The,” *ABD* 2 (1992): 700–708 (701); or the contributions in the volume edited by Thomas B. Dozeman, Craig A. Evans and Joel N. Lohr, *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (VTS 164; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014).

⁴⁷ Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 159.

duties after having been delivered by the deity (SAA 9 3.5 iii 18–24).⁴⁸ Hilber further wants to demonstrate a general closeness between Ps 81 and the SAA 9.3 oracle collection, pointing to similarities in structure and content.⁴⁹ It should be pointed out, though, that the main characteristics of Ps 81 and Ps 95, namely the two-partite structure of summons and oracle, remain unparalleled in the Ancient Near Eastern materials. This suggests that—even though similarities exist—the psalms cannot be explained solely on the basis of the Ancient Near Eastern materials.

Thus, what can be said about the prophetic influence on the two Psalms 81 and 95? First, it is obvious that in both form and content, the two psalms exhibit prophetic features, and that there are similarities with Ancient Near Eastern materials. However, these features do not stand alone in the two psalms, but they occur in a blend with both narrative and legislative tradition elements. By offering a mosaic of different literary and tradition-historical backgrounds, the two psalms reveal themselves to be scribal products from post-exilic times that blend biblical history and prophecy with cultic elements.⁵⁰ As the

⁴⁸ See the translation in Nissinen, *Prophets*, 122–123: “As if I had not done or given to you anything! Did I not bend and give to you the four doorjambs of Assyria? Did I not vanquish your enemy? Did I not gather your foes and adversaries [like but]terflies?”. On the edition, see further Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, 25–27.

⁴⁹ See Hilber, *Cultic Prophecy*, 159–161.

⁵⁰ This thesis proceeds from the assumption that the phenomenon of biblical interpretation developed mainly in scribal circles that were responsible for the formation of biblical tradition, see e.g. the overview by Reinhard G. Kratz, *Historical and Biblical Israel: The History, Tradition, and Archives of Israel and Judah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Differently, David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), has recently challenged the dichotomy between oral and written tradition, arguing for an “oral-written” transmission throughout

textual evidence demonstrates that they are not clear-cut copies of the Ancient Near Eastern materials, and as they have a wider theological and form-critical background, I am rather hesitant to classify these texts as examples of “cultic prophecy.”⁵¹ This is not to deny that the phenomenon was known in the Ancient Near East and that it was certainly present in the cult of Ancient Israel, but both Ps 81 and 95 should not be used as evidence for the religious historical phenomenon. Rather, in the same way that biblical prophecy represents an offshoot of Ancient Near Eastern prophecy, Psalms 81 and 95 might be considered an offshoot of Ancient Near Eastern cultic prophecy – or as Hermann Spieckermann puts it, “a mediate heir of prophecy.”⁵²

Against this background, it is now possible to assess the specific inheritance of these psalms. It is obvious that in both texts the remembrance of biblical history in the divine speech serves to legitimate the present proclamation of judgement and salvation.⁵³

the formation of the Hebrew Bible; this would certainly allow to see Ps 81 and 95 as liturgical works that draw on different (oral and literary) traditions. However, the variety of materials in the two psalms and the fact that the characteristic of divine speech appears only as one form element in a mix with others, speaks – to my mind – rather for a scribal adaptation of “cultic prophecy”, see in the following.

⁵¹ This hesitancy is shared e.g. by Hossfeld, “Das Prophetische,” 243, who sees the psalms in question as the products of theologians rather than institutional cult prophets, and Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 306–307, who comments on the distinct biblical interpretation (“Schriftgelehrsamkeit”) that represent a characteristic feature of these texts.

⁵² Spieckermann, “Rede Gottes,” 217, with regard to divine speech in the Book of Psalms: “Sie scheint in ihm [dem Psalter, A.K.] aufs Ganze gesehen ein Erbe der Prophetie zu sein, kein direkter Erbfall allerdings, sondern ein mittelbarer”.

⁵³ See Hossfeld, “Das Prophetische,” 243. See also Doeker, *Gottesrede*, 296–298, who classifies the function of the divine speech in Pss 81 and 95 as examples of a “divine speech with paraenetic function” (“Gottesreden mit paränetischer Funktion”).

However, it is striking that both psalms comprise elements of what I want to denote *realisation*, a way to make the past relevant to the present audience: In Ps 81, the introduction of the audition uses a Hebrew imperfect tense (81:6: אשמע), thus speaking into the present of the reader/hearer, who are made the direct addressee of the call to listen (81:9). Consequently, the present audience becomes the successors of the biblical fathers, and they are admonished to learn from their fathers' disobedience if they want to enjoy the divine presence and delight in his provisions. Similarly, in Ps 95 the summons to listen to God's voice on the present day (95:7c: היום) transcends the psalm's present and speaks into the here and now of the audience. In this way, the cultic wrapping of the prophetic message opens up a space, by which the audience can appropriate the divine admonition and participate in the relationship between God and his people, entering into the divine rest (95:11).

To sum up, in this contribution I have set out to investigate if Ps 81 and 95 could qualify as examples of cultic prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. I do not want to exclude the possibility that there were cultic prophets in Ancient Israel, but for both psalms I hope to have demonstrated that they are documents of scribal theology rather than cultic prophecy. We deal with scribal theology that in the form of prophetic psalms spiritualises the divine oracle and instructs the present audience with didactic references about the past in biblical history.